

The Listening Project: Brooklyn

Practicing the art of listening one story at a time... a project by Dempsey Rice

About The Listening Project

On the face of it, Brooklyn is an international brand, home to hipsters, artists and artisanal food. Things handmade, homegrown, crafted together and decidedly retro in their taste thrive here. Underneath that face, Brooklyn IS retro — it is a place where life stories have been written for hundreds of years. Babies are born, families are raised, immigrants settle and lives are built. While the brand may sometimes overshadow the past, the people who remember a time before Brooklyn's reinvention are still here to share their stories.

The Listening Project: Brooklyn explores stories of old Brooklyn by connecting with the people who helped to build this Borough for the past 60, 70, 80, even 90 years. In the first half of the 20th Century, Brooklynites worked in New York City's jazz scene in the 1940s, fought in World War II and helped to liberate concentration camps. They were born on kitchen tables in a time before babies were born in the hospital, they grew up in tenements, played baseball and punchball and stickball in the streets, they didn't have enough money for a new dress and they remember a time in Brooklyn when only one or two cars parked on a block.

Each video that is part of *The Listening Project: Brooklyn* represents a single slice of an individual's life story, but the themes are universal: life, love, children, parents, growing up, work, dying and home. The videos reflect the humor and the pathos, the drama and the mundanity of life in Brooklyn during a time that is past.

The project is broken into three specific segments:

- [Listening](#) where I attentively listened to participants' life stories.
- [Reflection](#) where I listened to and edited each interview into several 2-5 minute segments.
- [Presentation](#) where the material was screened for the community.

This digital space is a further effort to present this material to you, the audience, so that you have the opportunity to listen to and share your reflections on and responses to the stories seen and heard here. I hope you will take the time to leave comments below the videos that have brought you to a point of reflection or that you will take a moment to [contact me](#).

The Nuts & Bolts behind The Listening Project: Brooklyn

Interviews for this project were done between April 2010 and April 2012 during my time as a SPARC artist in residence at the Council Center for Senior Citizens.

[Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide \(SPARC\)](#) is a community arts engagement program that places artists-in-residence at senior centers across the five boroughs of New York City. SPARC is a collaboration among the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, the Department for the Aging and the City's five local arts councils. This program has been supported, in part, by public funds provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and the

Department for the Aging. Programming support for this project was administered by the Brooklyn Arts Council.

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